

## PERISCOPING THE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This paper sought to identify the implementation challenges of National Policy on Education in Nigeria. It argues that there are numerous challenges impeding the effective implementation of the policy. This paper relies on secondary sources of data and the analysis was done thematically. The significance of this paper rest in the fact that it provides an insight for both policy makers and implementers on the necessary challenges that need to be addressed for the effective implementation of the policy. The paper concludes that it is imperative for policymakers to pay attention to evaluating the education policy, by so doing they will be able to aware of the extent to which they have successfully implemented the policy in line with their pre-determined objectives.

**Keywords:** National Policy on Education, Nigeria, Policy Implementation, Public Policy

## Introduction

The role that education plays in determining the state of development of any given country cannot be overemphasised, Nigeria inclusive. Education has been said to be one of the parameters for measuring the level of a country's development (Ejere, 2012; Omale and Ibietan, 2013; Ssenyongaa and Susanto, 2018). In Nigeria, education policy has witnessed what can be termed as either policy reforms, policy reversals or policy somersaults. That is to say that Nigeria has drafted diverse National Policy on Education (NPE) documents, the first was published in 1977, the second published in 1981, third published in 1998, fourth published in 2004, fifth published in and the sixth published in 2013. There is, therefore, a high level of policy inconsistencies and uncertainties, this goes in line with Lawal (2013:32-33) assertion that:

The government had been inconsistent in its national education policies to the extent that before one policy could be properly evaluated, the policy had been thrown away and replaced with another. The governments at the federal and state levels have the reputation of frequently disrespecting agreements which they freely entered into with the teachers, thus causing academic dislocations.

The poor performance of many public policies and programmes in Nigeria, regarding the accomplishment of their predetermined objectives, arise primarily from implementation disappointments (Ejere, 2011; Udofia and Abasilim, 2015). This is evident from the numerous policies implemented over the years in solving some of the fundamental problems faced in the Nigerian educational sector in achieving the human development of her citizens, create a conducive and an enabling environment, that can bring about the provision and revitalisation of skills, knowledge and competencies that are necessary for engendering a holistic development in the country. Regrettably, Nigeria's educational sector is still far from what is expected from the policy to achieve and this so because of the various implementation challenges faced by the sector. It is based on the foregoing that this paper identifies the implementation challenges of National Policy on Education in Nigeria.

The paper is premised on the Mazmanian and Sabatier's (1983) theory of policy implementation, which assumes that the extent to which a policy is successfully implemented is premised on three elements, which are the



traceability of the problem, the ability of the statute to structure implementation and the non-statutory variables affecting implementation. However, this article relies only on the first element as the basis for analysis and is been justified because of the central theme of this paper. The ex-post facto research design was adopted for this paper because of the dependence on secondary sources of data gotten from books, journal articles and the internet. While the data gotten were analysed thematically for ease of understanding and clarity. The article is structured as follows: it begins with giving a background on what the entire paper is all about in the form of an introduction, before conceptualising the major concepts of the paper. Next, an examination of the journey so far in the formulation of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria were discussed, followed by the description of the 2013 National Policy on Education, identification of the implementation challenges on the National Policy on education in Nigeria presented and conclusion made with proffering some recommendations.

## Conceptual Considerations

### *The Concept of Public Policy*

A plethora of definitions have been offered by scholars, researchers and writers on what public policy is. For instance, Jenkins (1978:15) defines public policy as "a set of interrelated decisions by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle be within the power of those actors to achieve." Dye (1995:2) refers to public policy as "whatever governments choose to do or not do." For Basu (2005:423), public policy is "a proposed course of action of an individual, a group, an institution or government, to realise a specific objective or purpose within a given environment." According to Anderson (2011:6), public policy is a "relatively stable, purposive course of action or inaction followed by an actor in dealing with a problem or matter of concern." Moreover, Eminue (2009) added that, quite a number of things that governments do have no policy significance. Perhaps, this informed the view of Heywood (2007) that public policy can be thought of as government actions that affect the lives of citizens. For this author, policy significance finds relevance when government actions, decisions, programmes have major impacts on the lives of the people. He also

stressed that public policy is purposive, which implies that, public policy is never made or conceived out of mistake, but that it is always a deliberate and conscious activity set out by the political actor(s) and or government officials. Furthermore, public policy when viewed as a course of action involves a number of components which include policy demands, policy decisions, policy articulations, policy outputs, policy outcomes and policy execution (Gberevbie, Ayo, Iyoha, Duruji, and Abasilim, 2015b; Gberevbie, Ibietan, Abasilim and Excellence-Oluye, 2015).

Another conceptualisation is that offered by Rose (1973) as "a long arrangement of pretty many related exercises, alongside their consequences for those concerned, rather than a concrete decision". The understanding behind this view of public policy is that in most cases, government policies could be targeted at solving a particular problem in the society. Hence, such policies are made with specific intent by major political actors which could be viewed differently by the majority of the people. Corroborating further, Eyestone (1971) asserts that public policy is the relationship of a government unit to its environment. It is seen as "a set of deeds propped by laws and regulations that are constantly designed, fine-tuned and enacted for the creation, organisation or functioning of the government" (Djamen, 2018:572). In a broad sense, these definitions attempt to show the "publicness" of government actions. Based on the above definitions; the characteristics of public policy is hereby advanced: First, public policies are whatever government chooses to do or not to do; second, public policies are intentional and have a pre-determined goal that must be achieved; third, public policies are made by public office holders and that the process of achieving its goals are being spelt out, including the limits/boundaries of the actors involved; fourth, actors involved in public policy transcends beyond the formal and the informal. That is to say, we have both the governmental and non-governmental actors; and fifth, public policy is a continuous process. That is, it is always going through a reformation. It is noteworthy to state that public policy is not also limited to a particular tier of government. It encompasses them.

### **The Concept of Policy Implementation**

Policy implementation is seen as "what develops between the establishment of an apparent intention on the part of the government to do something or stop doing something" (O'Toole, 2003:266). It is the



conversion of human and material inputs, including informational, technical, and support input into outputs in the form of goods and services (Eminue, 2009). More concisely, Paudel (2009: 38) defines policy implementation as "a process of a series of decisions and actions directed towards putting a prior authoritative decision into effect." It is also seen as the activities directed at translating goals and objectives into the reality of what was desired (Ekot, 2012). Expatriating more on the concept of policy implementation, Sapru (2011: 262) asserts that:

Policy implementation is the process of giving effect to settled public policies. Public policy implementation can also be defined as the total process of translating a government policy into tangible public goods and services. The public policy implementation process can be said to include what goes on between the pronouncement of a policy and its actual effect. It is important to view implementation not only in terms of putting policy into action but also in terms of observing what actually happens.

From the above definitions, one can deduce that policies are not self-executing; policy implementation is the procedure by which strategies are completed or executed. This suggests that when a policy is defined, some agencies of government should then put those policies into effect. This may include communicating with the intended targets of agency activities of new or changed directions. It is also imperative to note that policy implementation is the judicious utilisation of scarce resources to translate to reality the plans and intentions of government through specified agencies. This is so because government agencies are the machinery of government saddled with the responsibility of converting government desires to realities.

### **National Policy on Education in Nigeria: The Journey So Far**

The policy on education in Nigeria can either been seen as a course of action by government or a statement which manages and coordinate all activities guided by achieving objectives aimed at achieving national development through the educational sector (NPE, 2004). These policy helps to "regulate and control the conduct of the national educational system" (Ozurumba and Ebuara, 2013:31). It is also an initiative planned and carried out mostly by governments which determine the direction of the educational system

(Awokoya, 1981; Okoroma, 2000). The policy on education in Nigeria has witnessed three critical eras, the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras. Before colonialism, indigenous education was the "informal type of education offered within these communities by community members who had specific aptitudes or capacities in different fields of human undertaking" (Odukoya, 2010:2). The basic concern was "moral teaching, to influence individuals of that age to have the capacity to shape or impact a choice, separate the great and the awful and in addition to control individuals from the general public to fit in with societal esteems, standards and interests" (Mohammed and Yarinchi, 2013:7). However, with the advent of colonial government in Nigeria in late nineteenth century, came in its trail the presentation of Western Education, spearheaded by the missionaries who built mission schools and colleges nearby their houses of worship (Obomanu, 2011). The colonial administrators during this era "adopted a British form of education in Nigeria, subsequently the accompanying educational systems: primary, secondary, sixth form and higher education" (Fabunmi, 2005:2).

Following independence, the Colonial education was perceived as improper and non-receptive to the formative need of the nation, both in substance and approach it was not dynamic and did not allow for participation; repetition learning was utilised to the prohibition of other creative techniques for teaching (Ezekiel-Hart, 2011). The mode of teaching was essentially "frontal, teacher-focused, remembrance/spewing forth while activity-based, flexible classroom arrangement and learner-centred and participatory approach were non-existent" (Ezekiel-Hart, 2011:369). In view of these limitations, the post-colonial states set about her own national policy on education first published in 1977 (Okoroma, 2000). The policy on education then was the first far-reaching and indigenous educational document in post-independence Nigeria (Olatunji, 2015). The 1977 National Policy on Education was modified in 1984, 2004, 2007 and 2013. The 2013 version of the National Policy record on Education is the latest release of the national approach archive on education in Nigeria (Olatunji, 2015). It is "the national guideline for effective administration, management and implementation of education at all tiers of government" (NPE 2013).



## Implementation Challenges of National Policy on Education in Nigeria

Nigeria as a country has never been short of formulating educational policies, programs and initiatives, but fails in the execution of the policies to realise the intent for which the policies were originally stated (Ejere, 2011). This implies that there are some challenges faced that have hindered the effective implementation of the policy. Some of the challenges as espoused by scholars include corruption, lack of continuity in government policies by the successive administration and inadequate human and material resources among others (Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015; Abasilim, Eyo, Adah and Popoola, 2016). Studies in this regard, across all spectrum from pre-primary, tertiary to special need school have consistently agreed that these policies failed due to lack of political will, corruption, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, problem of dearth of qualified teachers, lack of adequate funding, inappropriate curriculum; as well as the dilemma of disarticulation of schools, negative attitudes of teachers which is triggered by poor remuneration, religious intolerance or fundamentalism, lack of determination on the part of policy executives as well as lack of astute and articulate implementation of policies, ethnic haughtiness, that prompts situation of unsuitable personnel to man education sector, technological problem, leadership and administration problem among others (Ozurumba and Ebuara, 2013; Oriakhi and Ameh, 2014; Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans, 2015; Abasilim, Eyo, Adah and Popoola, 2016).

Specifically, study of early childhood school by Sooter (2013) revealed that despite NPE on early childhood education as stated, nearly all early childhood school are privately owned and this school are bedevilled by several challenges among which include overcrowded classroom due to lack of adherence to ratio 1:25 between the teacher and the pupil, lack of supervision or monitoring, the position of Nigerian language as a medium of instruction is hard to come by in most of the schools as most of the instructional materials are still in English, in-effective supervision of early childhood institutions by appropriate agency leading to the use of unqualified and unprofessional teachers who are neither trained to teach nor know how to handle or relate with children. Similarly, studies on Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme affirm that UBE failed in Nigeria because of lack of qualified teachers, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, corruption, lack of health facilities, lack of willpower by

implementing institution to see through the policy, overlapping function of bureaucratic agencies that oversee the implementation of the policies, lack of instructional material and teaching aids, inadequate funding, population explosion leading to inadequate teacher to pupil ratio, among others (Ogunsanmi and Ibimiluyi, 2014, Domike and Odey 2014, Daura and Audu, 2015). Furthermore, Bolaji, Gray and Campbell-Evans (2015) contend that among all of the causes of the failure of UBE; corruption stands out as one of the most debilitating factors. They noted cases, where fund intended for UBE, were diverted for personal use by the Governors, delay or outright disqualification of teacher's access to service for refusal to offer a bribe.

Also, there were instances of embezzlement of public funds; corruption in the form of granting contracts, promoting staff; without following due process; the dispensation of justice; misuse of public offices, positions and benefits; book publishing; publications; documents; valuable security and accounts. Furthermore, similar challenges were also noted to have bedevilled NPE in the tertiary institution. The National Policy on Education, 2004 stressed the need for the integration of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the tertiary institution but it has been revealed that the integration of ICT in university education is still lacking in availability and usage (Egboka and Olibie, 2010). In a similar manner, Ozurumba and Ebuara (2013) argue that NPE failed in the tertiary institution also due to lack of astute and articulate implementators. They further highlighted other challenges that impede on the effective implementation of the National Policy on Education to include: staff capacity, institutional carrying capacity, bureaucracy, poor funding and politicisation of education policy for campaign purpose (Ozurumba and Ebuara, 2013; Adetunji, 2015). It is pertinent to note that, it is these many problems that beset the NPE 2004 edition that lead to the revision of the policy.

However, despite the 2013 National Policy on Education which would have attended to some of the identified weakness, is still fraught with several challenges. According to Olatunji (2015), although the policy spells out the set of belief on which Nigeria's philosophy of education is anchored on, yet none of the spelt out criteria constitutes a philosophy. In other words, there was no particular statement to show what the philosophy of education itself is. Another challenge with the policy is that it comprises of



a lot of ambiguities that are not self-explanatory given the many complexities of the Nigeria society. Like previous education policy, the 2013 NPE raises a fundamental question in term of the meaning of the terms used in the document. Specifically, national consciousness seems ambiguous, it raises the question of definition and begs for answers: What is Nigeria national consciousness and does it exist? Is there a national consciousness or ethnic consciousness? How will the National educational policy create, develop or promote national consciousness?

The question of national unity through education also raises the question of how much will be achieved through education in the face of past failed programmes at national integration. For instance, the cultural policy of NPE, 2004 which seek to preserve the culture and promote unity through the teaching of indigenous language is fraught with structural distortions and statutory ambivalences which stand in the way of full actualisation of the NPE's cultural component.

Another major challenge with the 2013 NPE, is the wide gap in the execution. That is, "a widening distance between the stated policy goals and the actualisation of such arranged goals" (Bolaji, Gray & Campbell-Evans 2015:59). The lack of implementation plan makes the comment of Omale and Ibietan (2013) apt in their notion of the 2004 National Policy on Education. They note that "the policy is a mere grandiose set of intentions without a management strategy of implementation" which can also be true for the 2013 National Policy on Education. Although the policy has a well-documented plan, there was no strategy for implementation. According to the 2015 Education For All (EFA), Global Monitoring Report (GMR), there are 17 million more ignorant adults in the country in 2008, than there were in 1991, an increase of 71 percent. It further notes "that the gap between the poor and the average in Nigeria has increased with the number of children from the poorest households going to primary school falling from 35 percent to 25 percent in 2013, adding that enrolment rates may fall even more given the increase in Boko Haram's campaigns against education."

Finally, a major challenge with the 2013 NPE, which explain the reason for lack of implementation is the lack of political will which manifest in inadequate funding and the "politicisation" of education policies, which has become a campaign tool in the hands of politicians. Also, the policy is gender insensitive given that it does not acknowledge the security issues

girls face in their school environment. Recent happening in the country has shown that schools are no longer safe for the girl child. On April 14, 2014, 276 female students were kidnapped from the Chibok Government Girls' Secondary School, Borno State and also the Government Girls Technical College in Dapchi on February 19, 2018, by the Islamist group popularly known as Boko Haram. More, recently there was the abduction of three girls from Babington Macaulay Junior seminary secondary school in Lagos (Odumbo, Shittu, Akinyemi & Momoh, 2017). It is in the light of these issues that we offer the following recommendation.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the review on the implementation challenges of National Policy on Education in Nigeria, this study confirms that corruption, lack of continuity in government policies by successive administration, inadequate human and material resources and others remain the major implementation challenges that have impeded on the effective implementation of the Educational Policy in Nigeria based on the review done. It is on this premise that we affirm that unless the challenges identified in this paper are addressed, the policy on education will just be another document that will not yield the desired goals of government. In addition, policymakers and public administrators must pay attention to evaluating the education policy, by so doing they will be aware of the extent to which they have successfully implemented the policy in line with their pre-determined objectives. There is also an urgent need to review the 2013 NPE so as to resolve the many ambiguities, clarify terms and specify the function of each tier of government in achieving their goal.

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